

# Estimates of membership of public libraries

## Western Cape

STEFAN WEHMEYER

Assistant Director: Support Services

During 2005, the head of Provincial Treasury requested the Library Service to research the membership profile of public libraries.

Traditionally, membership records are kept by public librarians. However, these records only indicate whether a member is a child or an adult. Children are registered as members between the ages of 0-12, and the rest are recorded as adults. It became obvious that further investigation was required in order to provide more detailed information.

### Gender and age of library members

The computerised PALS library system (which is used at the majority of public libraries) made it possible to get a more detailed picture of the different age groups as well as gender.

### Membership according to gender at all PALS libraries (2004)

Age group	Percentage male	Percentage female	Percentage of age group
0-12	46	54	29.9
13-18	43.3	56.7	15.1
19-35	34.0	66	25.3
36-60	31.6	68.4	22.3
60+	35.1	64.9	7.4
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>37.1</b>	<b>62.9</b>	

In all age groups female users are the majority. In the potentially economic active age groups (19-60), females constitute 66% and more of library users. Very interesting is the fact that the youth aged 0-18 comprises 45% of library users.

This information relates to all PALS public libraries. Differences between urban and rural libraries were not investigated. Further research should be undertaken to

investigate the reason for the large difference between genders.

### Race and library membership

An indication of race is not required when a person joins a public library. It is therefore problematic to determine accurate membership figures per race. The last time when fairly accurate membership per race statistics were available was in 1989, before the Separate Amenities Act was scrapped. But, by 1989 most of the libraries in the urban areas were in any case open to all races.

However, in order to determine racial representation of members of libraries, librarians of public libraries were requested to provide an estimate of library use per race and during May 2005 a questionnaire was sent to all public librarians. One of the questions set was to estimate library use per race group (African, Coloured, White, Indian).

Population statistics for municipal areas were sourced from the web site [www.demarcation.org.za](http://www.demarcation.org.za). These statistics reflect the 2001 census. The Indian segment of the population was too small to make statistically significant deductions. It is important to remember that the number of library members per race group are **estimates** by librarians from the relevant public libraries.

Not all librarians attempted to give estimates and the following table is a sample of different rural municipalities.

*Improved library use and the establishment of a reading culture go hand in hand with improved socio-economic factors*



## Estimates of library use per race (Rural municipalities)

<b>Breede River Municipality</b>	<b>African (%)</b>	<b>Coloured (%)</b>	<b>White (%)</b>	<b>Indian (%)</b>
* Population	20.1	65.6	14.0	0.3
** Racial groups of library members	10.0	71.6	18.0	0.5
*** Segment of population using libraries	9.3	20.5	24.2	28.7
<b>George Municipality</b>	<b>African (%)</b>	<b>Coloured (%)</b>	<b>White (%)</b>	<b>Indian (%)</b>
Population	27.3	50.4	22.1	0.3
Racial groups of library members	10.4	49.2	39.9	0.6
Segment of population using libraries	10.1	25.9	47.9	55.9
<b>Oudtshoorn Municipality</b>	<b>African (%)</b>	<b>Coloured (%)</b>	<b>White (%)</b>	<b>Indian (%)</b>
Population	8.1	76.5	15.3	0.1
Racial groups of library members	9.5	17.4	50.2	
Segment of population using libraries	3.5	17.4	35.1	0.1
<b>Knysna Municipality</b>	<b>African (%)</b>	<b>Coloured (%)</b>	<b>White (%)</b>	<b>Indian (%)</b>
Population	31.9	44.1	23.8	0.1
Racial groups of library members	9.8	38.7	51.6	0
Segment of population using libraries	13.1	37.4	92.6	0
<b>Berg River Municipality</b>	<b>African (%)</b>	<b>Coloured (%)</b>	<b>White (%)</b>	<b>Indian (%)</b>
Population	5	75.6	19.2	0.1
Racial groups of library members	2	58.6	39.3	0.2
Segment of population using libraries	12.1	23.7	62.3	30.5

\* Population = the population composition of municipalities expressed as a percentage. (2001 population statistics.)

\*\* Racial groups of library members = represents the total use of all libraries in a municipal area in terms of a percentage breakdown of African, Coloured, White and Indian.

\*\*\* Segment of population using libraries = out of a population of x numbers for a specific racial group, percentage indicated are library users.

## Conclusions and recommendations

Conclusions should be qualified as statistics and were based on estimates and observations.

The percentage of African users are consistently in the region of 10%. This is much lower than the percentage for the other groups. More research should be done to target this group to encourage the use of libraries and also to establish a reading culture. Factors that play a role in the non-use of libraries should be researched. Possible factors can be anything from the lack of adequate facilities, geographic barriers, to socio-economic factors that hinder library use.

Coloured library users as a percentage of the coloured population, vary between 17% and 35%. Many people live on small settlements and farms - locations which are not within walking distance of town libraries. Service extension should be improved, such as the provision of more mobile libraries.

In the case of Breede River, the estimate for library use for whites seems to be very low. (The very high percentage for Knysna was definitely influenced by seasonal holidaymakers, which were obviously not included in the 2001 population census). Reasons for non-use of public libraries should also be investigated, possible reasons can be that this group is more inclined to buy their own books or have better access to alternative information sources such as the Internet.

## Estimates of library use per race in urban areas

It was very difficult to estimate the race of library members in the urban areas. None of the public librarians responded to this question. An electronic mail letter was sent to the manager of libraries of Cape Town, but she also replied that they were not able to provide estimates and to get reliable information would be very difficult. Due to a shortage of personnel in the city libraries, they would not be able to assist with random sampling.

In the light of this it was decided to focus this research on the urban black townships as it can be assumed that 99% of the library members will be African as the population statistics indicate a 99% African population.

When one takes a broader look at African townships the following deduction can be made: adding up all the members of these libraries and expressing these statistics as a percentage of the total urban African population, only 7.7% of Africans are library members. These statistics must be qualified, as people residing in African areas also use other libraries in the Central Business Districts, for example, Cape Town Central, Wynberg and Bellville. This is obvious when one observes the patronage of any CBD library.

The membership and circulation statistics of Khayelitsha libraries are very erratic and thus not very reliable. This can be gleaned from the following table:

### Membership of libraries in Khayelitsha

(Estimated population 341 684)

	Membership	Circulation	% Library members
2001	11497	230043	3.4
2002	6821	138828	2.0
2003	14726	77237	4.2
2004	21778	65611	6.4

Even if use of Africans of libraries in CBDs are also added, it is not expected that the percentage membership as calculated from the total population would exceed 15%. In-house use of library material also plays a significant role at all libraries. (To use a library, one doesn't have to be a library member.)

In the next table it is clear that in-house use is actually consistently higher than physical items issued from the libraries.

### Summary of Khayelitsha libraries

	Khayelitsha	Kulani	Masakhane	Moses Mabhida	Nazeema Isaacs	Total
Size of library (m <sup>2</sup> )	920	143	1000	1100	960	4123
Seats	30	35	108	100	80	353
Computer workstations	2	3	5	4	5	19
Internet access	1	1	1	1	1	5
Local Business Corners	0	0	1	1	1	3
Staff	6	4	7	8	5	30
Qualified staff	0	1	2	4	3	10
Hour open per weeks	48	48	43	47	42	228
Literacy classes	0	0	0	0	0	0
Membership	2284	6737	6597	3313	2847	21778
Circulation	12289	8144	13381	22728	13609	70151
In-house use	15488	10564	24356	38722	13955	103085

### Recommendations

Research should be done as to whether libraries in townships and the kind of services rendered by these libraries are sufficient and efficient. A project to undertake this research has been earmarked for 2006.

#### *Libraries per capita*

When new libraries are planned, the Provincial Library Service has a norm of allocating 0.07 square metres to each member of the population. In Khayelitsha, with a population of 340 000, only 0.01 square metres are available per member of the population. This indicates a potential shortage of 19 libraries. In the light of existing libraries not optimally utilised, serious research should, however, be done into the issue why current resources are not optimally used. Factors such as a lack of a reading culture or a lack of awareness of the services libraries can provide, may play a role.

#### *Marketing*

More should be done to target the African population of the Western Cape, through more pro-active and dynamic marketing.

#### *Socio-economic*

Improved library use and the establishment of a reading culture go hand in hand with improved socio-economic factors. This does not mean that we should adopt a waiting approach, but we should actively contribute with the building of human capital, social capital and infrastructure with comprehensive library and information services.

#### *Cooperation with other stakeholders*

We should communicate requirements for libraries to other stakeholders where new townships are developed. During the 1990s the Library Service was actively part of the Integrated Serviced Land Project (ISLP). As a consequence to this involvement libraries were built in areas such as Delft South, Phillipi East and Brown's Farm.

#### *Financial*

The current issue regarding the financial responsibility for public libraries should also be resolved as a matter of urgency. Without adequate finances, no local authority is willing to expand library services which in turn hamstrings the provincial government in their quest to enhance and expand services.

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